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There is a smell in the room of bedclothes, and warmth. She is a dark figure in the bed, the center of the smell, of the heat. The shades across the window filter a grey daylight. He looks at her through the darkness; she is looking back at him.

“Anything you need?”

Her face from under the comforter is hot and red and swollen.

“Just—to be alone.”

He nods too quickly as he backs out the door, pulling it with him, pulling himself into the light.

It is early afternoon. In the bathroom, he sits for a long time on the side of the tub, resting his feet on the pads of his toes, watching the trembling of his knees.

One year, I was a wind-up toy.
I was a robot, three years in a row.

Later, the hospital calls. “No, not much bleeding,” he tells them, hushing his voice, glancing toward the door.

“Would she like a hot water bottle?” asks the nurse. She sounds as though she is offering to bring it over herself.

Will it hurt?
Is it going to hurt?

It’s in a drawer with bobby pins, nail scissors, and little jeweled balls of bath oil, brightly red and green and yellow.

He fills the red rubber bag with water from the tap, hot enough to scald him when it overflows at the mouth. He takes it to her room, screwing on the white plastic cap. He hesitates, and leans his mouth to the crack between the door and the wall.

“Kristen?”

No answer. The taste of wood on his lips.

“Kris, honey?”

Her voice is weak and sleepy. “Michael?”

“Honey, do you want a hot water bottle?”

“What for?”

He doesn’t know.

“For your back, honey.” Stop calling her that. He thinks of his wife, Sharon: she disapproves of nicknames. I am not your pumpkin, she said once, and he tried not to laugh. Today is Hallowe’en.

He opens the door a little, and the smell is still hanging in the room. She has thrown the covers off one arm, and it reaches paper white across the bed.

He squeezes her hand, but it stays limp in his. He raises her up gently, in the same way he lifts his daughter Amanda when she had fallen asleep watching tv. There is the same heaviness in his palm, the same dampness of skin, from Kristen’s thin back. He puts the hot water bottle against her lower back. She is half-sleeping again. There is a crust of sleep in the corner of her left eye.

He closes himself out into the light again.

Did it hurt?

Time to kill. He sits in the late afternoon of her livingroom. A rhombus of light moves slowly across the floor, lengthening, creeping like ivy up the side of her door.

It is Hallowe’en. The street is unnaturally
silent. He imagines children in the elevators of apartment buildings, costumed, giggling, with pillow cases. Accompanied by their mothers, even in apartment buildings. Telling each other in stairwells, Two-oh-six has Mars Bars. Something like that. Michael grew up in a suburb, wearing himself out covering ten or fifteen blocks. Each house decorated orange and black. Pumpkins in the windows, candles glowing through the rind as if it were skin.

When he arrived at ten that morning to drive her, there was a bowl of tootsie rolls by the door, waiting. He took two and unwrapped them nervously, watching her fumble with her coat and search for her glasses. When she had both on, she faced him and smiled, letting out her breath in a sudden sigh. Shrugging her shoulders. "Ready?" she said brightly, as if they were going to the theatre. He thought she looked beautiful; her coat was black felt. She was wearing lipstick: burnt orange, bleeding a little into her skin.

*I was a bride. One year, I was a gypsy.*

Did you pay the rent?

I was up again last night, all night.

Sharon gives out bags of peanuts, tiny red boxes of raisins. The word will go around, through the draughty stairwell and in the mirrored elevator, *Don't bother with two-twelve.* Sharon will look through Mandy's bag before she lets her eat anything. She will throw out anything suspicious: a piece of plastic twisted shut, a Hershey's with the foil loose. Mandy is seven, and almost too old to be trick-or-treating. Already she wears loose bracelets and listens to records. She is going to be Madonna for Hallowe'en. Michael has a helpless feeling that his daughter is already too old, that soon she will ask him to drive her on dates. He imagines his seven-year old with lecherous football players, smoking a cigarette.

Kristen in bed looks so helpless that she makes Michael feel paternal, even though she is twenty-two, only four years younger than he. Kristen looks after Amanda Thursdays after school, which is where the latter acquired her taste for jewelry. Once when Michael knocked on the door to get Mandy, he found her wearing bright berry-colored lipstick. That evening, Sharon crossed the hall and politely asked Kristen not to let Mandy play with her makeup anymore.

Now Michael eats the tootsie rolls slowly, having moved the bowl to his elbow as he sits on the couch. It is barely four o'clock, but he will not leave Kristen in the darkness by herself. He watches tv.: in the dead grey he can see a reflection of the window, and in front of it, squeezed out of proportion, the dark-haired man that is himself.

Who was it? Who?

*I spent the summer in Paris; it didn’t help.*

Did you pay the rent?

The tootsie rolls were the excuse, on the phone. "Michael, I need to ask a favor of you or Sharon. Are you free tonight to watch for trick-or-treaters over here?" She said, *trickah-treetahs.* Over here was her apartment, three-fourteen, across from his, three-twelve.

Before he could say yes, she was explaining,
and that was how he knew something was wrong. “They do terrible things if you don’t open up the door and dish out.” Her laugh, high and wailing, hardly nervous, but stretched thin, somehow. “One year we went to the movies and left the lights out, and they sprayed shaving cream all over the door.” They are the trickah-treetahs. Michael found himself clutching the phone, as if it would slide from his hand. Broad ridges stood out on his knuckles. Kristen said confidentially, “I have to go to the hospital, and I expect they’ll dope me up. I want to be able to sleep the night.” Her voice said, ask me, don’t ask me.

The phone rings so loudly that Michael suspects he has been asleep. He picks it up.

“Hello?”

A man says, “May I talk to Kris. Tell her it’s Terry.”

Michael, aware of his absurdity, says, “Kristen’s sleeping. She’s ill now.”

Terry says, “Please have her call me.” He hangs up suddenly, a gasp of silence on the line. Michael sets the phone down gently, gently, and writes Terry on the pad of Post-It Notes. The light on the answering machine blinks repeatedly. Without pushing play, Michael hears the messages, as they must be, in his head. He has a pang of sympathy for someone. On reflection, it seems to be for himself.

Hush, your mother’s trying to write.
I want to have a lock on my door.
Semi, where is the whisk? The what? The whisk. We don’t have one.

Ask me, don’t ask me. Michael doesn’t know — how could he know? — that nearly eight years later, he will meet Kristen Hausen in a McDonald’s in Paris, near Beaubourg. She recognizes him, crossing between café tables to kiss him on both cheeks. Her dark hair is cut short; at her table, a middle-aged man feeds french fries to two little dark-haired boys.

“My husband,” she points. “My André and my Anton.”

Michael waves to them, feeling like a fool. Fending off her questions, he unwraps the decay of his life: he and Sharon have been divorced for two years, Mandy is in high school, he has given up teaching to freelance. Yes, no, how are you? His cooling french fries, the congealing fat of his cheeseburger, reflect him, embarrass him. Yellow wax paper and waxy napkins. Hot fudge sundae. She may as well have pointed to him: my past.

“You look great without your moustache,” she says.
He has never had a moustache. It breaks upon him that he may well have been in love with her, once.

Kristen tells him about her job in Paris, leaning over the table, wooden earrings swinging past her hair. A silence falls between them. She leans even closer: Michael can see down the front of her blouse. She is heavier than when he knew her. “I love my children,” she says to him, softly, as if this is a secret. “I know you don’t think I do, but I do.”

He cannot protest. She will say nothing else. After a moment, she rejoins her family at their table. And how could she know that Amanda calls him from her mother’s to accuse him of never having loved her? I never had a childhood, Amanda tells him. And how could Kristen be expected to know that?

He answers a knock and parcels out candy to three unrecognizable figures. One wears a hooded cape. From deep within the hood, two bright red lights glow instead of eyes.

Her voice comes weakly from behind the
door.

"Michael?"
"Kris?"
"Can you come here please?" Something they used to say to their mother after apocalypse.

She has rolled against the wall; propping herself up with one hand behind her, she indicates the sheet. He stretches his hand in the darkness to touch it. When his fingers meet the damp cooling warmth, he thinks instantly, blood! And the adrenalin in his fingers still thinks so, even when he sees his fingers come away unstained. Then he feels a terrible sinking sympathetic shame for an adult who has peed herself.

"The hot water bottle," she says. "I think it leaked."
And he is all self-hatred, frustration, incompetence.

I walk across a black paved parking lot, jingling my keys in my hand. I am thirty years old, I am fifteen, I am twenty-two. The heat reflecting off the cars waves my vision. I thought I saw — From a distance, I can hear the ticking of your typewriter. I missed my period.
A Theme for August

In the rangings August takes
The names of heat entail a kind of culture
A lazy heaping in the house of words in strains
to type the sidewalk-frying eggs,
the lank desires,
and the ungainly souls of air conditioner thieves dissembling
in secret rooms, and serving spoons and a front stoop
buckled and swelling.
A name is one to itself, and without system
A lingered-over yawn across the chairs.
It rules the house
and smacks against itself like an infant pleasure.
The name of sweltering, for instance,
will often please itself this way because
it loved its own life
and doesn’t try to find the spells
the rain says when it falls
steady and slight at night outside
the windows.
It rained in a line outside last night while sweltering dreamt
where proud heat had filled the dark rooms
with unceremonious phrases.

Laura Powers
Notes Toward a Supreme Carrot Cake

It must be abstract

In such a way so that the here and there will flock to it at nightfall breathing poems around its empty plate.

So that Andreas Delmarva the beautiful household god from Athens New York will seek some encomiums to decide its sweetness.

It must have cream cheese frosting

Think not of what you baked it with. Give the gesticulating bliss no names.

While ten thousand spoonlicking children from every gorgeous corner of the spoonlicking world all lick their spoons in a glimmered stainless steel continuum.

It must give vaguenesses

An old man gathered up his jowls about him and called up one caked moment as pure incertitude there being no exact articulation in it yet with each and every vagueness undulating like the ambiguous swallows.

Laura Powers
when the gun boomed I near jumped from
my basket
I lay splendidous among throw pillows tongue
lolling from my teeth forelegs folded my bristly tail
up between my hinds and when I heard the crack of
the bullet going airbound I shuffled to the floor and
paws hit tile
notice that I didn’t jump I only near jumped
I shuffled to the floor
though there was a murder I didn’t care to
catch the triggerman no I had aims with more core
with more pith with ambrosia I was a dog who loved
a woman and she never loved me back
she might have claimed otherwise in the
bright-lit afternoons when she ruffled my back with
her long thin hands but she was a woman and I a dog
and her love came with strings ficus tangle conditionals
she was Karen Braun Alpiso and she shared
a bed with a man named Marc the business-suit who
kicked my ribs and shuffled past my eyes with a
white torn towel wrapped round his legs smelling
cleaner than I knew he was that dirty cock that
violent fuck he had a mustache on his face and a
meanness in his manner when he stepped in my
direction I heard poison in my head
he went down hard on my tail once as I slept
we dogs don’t sleep like people do setting
aside a stretch of time for open eyes and another
stretch for closed eyes instead we droop our heads
and lids when we fucking damn well please
I never was at ease with the way Karen and
her husband vanished for a lengthy spell from
midnight until dawn and especially I could never get
used to the way they fucked with him atop her his
skinny ass coiled and then uncoiled her eyes wide
and flat their moans incompatible and ugly
and can’t hold a candle to the way we do it
she had maroon in her hair when she bent
down to feed me in the morning with his scent still
lingering upon her
he slept late most days and then beat a mad
rush through the morning routine he showered
quickly and angrily and ate breakfast with the
impatience of a hateful man the coffee snarling down
his vicious throat
she woke up early and felt the sunrise work
across her shoulders and her breasts and then she
came to feed me and to let her hair dangle down over
her face and into mine
when I eagerly loosed my tongue I was not
aiming for the food but for Karen her hair her
equally lovely eyes her legs which usually were bare
and smooth before breakfast and even the downy
arrowgrove between them
she left me and I cried but my tears don’t
work the way that human tears do and they were
invisible more of a sensation than actual droplets
and the sensation that was my tears built inside me it
traveled down my nose and back to my eyes and then
it broke apart in the air with a sad and tiny pop
to explain how much I wanted her I would
have to first describe those I got
a plump and dull spaniel who was pushing
out puppies like factory work used to implicate me in
her heat and she sickened me when I fucked her I
got not even the slightest hum within my mind
I think part of the reason was the way she
reminded me of my mother so fucking docile and
open to such pain and my father who spent the night
in the neighborhood perhaps and no more just stuck
it in and then saw himself safely out of danger
I never saw him though once in an alleyway in my stray days I ran upon a dog with markings identical to mine and a few years longer in his teeth and I suspected him as my father and shouted in his direction but he was not my father only some broken odor of a bonebag his fur peeled away to raw skin and whose only happiness lay in the death that was coming for him soon

he was not my father because I did not want him for my father

and my real father well who knows with these things they are not always as simple as they seem and what could be the truth might wake up as an untruth

the sleeping dog that knows the truth must not be allowed to lie

the old alleydog was more a sign of my mother’s sadness than my own because when I told her of the meeting she wept until she whined and she told me that was your father that was your father how could you leave him there alone in the coldstreet with his skin raw like that

she so wanted him to be my father that she gave up all her pride and when she did I hated her like plague and I pushed her from my mind

I felt mean when I saw her weak like that and I felt dead when I heard her weep like that and I felt young and alone and afraid and other things I wanted not to feel but she made me feel with her sobs and her fucking stupid memory I wanted her away from me that bitch

Karen never seemed so weak instead she seemed so beautiful and before she left for work we would sit sometimes just the two of us without that Marc and she would stroke my back and legs while she spoke a lovely lilt

I noticed a bruise upon her thigh or neck and the same downdrifting sadness welled inside my eyes but I did not say a thing

which isn’t to say I couldn’t have maybe she wouldn’t have understood but I could have and I think she knew I could have

Marc didn’t that fuckface of a shit of a husband who didn’t love her when he said he did and who hurt her when she didn’t want

once they fought and when Marc screamed and began to kick I huddled beneath a table I was scared of his feet because they broke me when they hit against my skin and bones and when I hid Karen said Don’t Scream You’re Scaring Him and Marc said Scaring Who Oh Jesus You Stupid Cunt It’s Only A Dog

that’s the same Marc who tied me behind the house when I gave whines and didn’t know I was warning Karen to keep away from him

they fought that night also and when he hit her in the face and breasts I whimpered and he tied me out in the backyard and told me to woof all I wanted because no one would pay attention

he had hard lines around his eyes and a sharp arch to his voice

he hit me with his briefcase for good measure just swung it back and then forth into my left side I heard a faint rib cracking and when I yelped in pain he said Buddy No One Knows What You’re Woofing and then as if I wouldn’t remember the pain he sent to me the lines around his eyes softened and he gave a gentle pat upon my nose and sides and said I’m Sorry For All This Boy I Can Tell You’re Confused By The Way You Bark

I wanted to tell him you say we arf you say we woof you say we bark but we’re not saying woof
of arf or bark we’re saying Fuck You or Choke On Blood or Slit Your Asshole With A Razor is what we’re saying and I don’t respect you in the least little way despite your belief that I do it’s protection and no more than that certainly if I could break your fucking neck and escape unscathed I would do so in a second which for me would be seven seconds which would give me plenty of time to feel the satisfying rip of teeth into flesh you pissant and fuck

I didn’t speak to Marc out of pride that night except I strained against the leash in the yard and winced when I put pressure on my tender rib

I listened to him and Karen in bed and she sounded so beautiful and naked that I thought for a moment she might love me

the next day she came outside later than usual and her face was tear-streaked and she untied me and caressed the painful spot on my side Poor Baby she said Why Did He Have To Go And Do That

Poor Baby she said I’ll Go Call The Vet And See If We Can’t Get You Fixed Up

we drove to the doctor and I was happy to ride alongside her in the front seat and the windows all were down and the air came streaming through and my nose felt cold and for a moment I felt good and even strong despite the ache

the doctor who had large hands and loose eyes poked and prodded his white coat drifting atop me like a cloudbank with a purpose his voice descending like wise rain when he told Karen to make sure I took it easy on myself and that if anyone was treating this dog improper it would make him very sad

in the car she relieved she rubbed my headtop she kissed me with the amber of her lips she whispered to me how happy she was for my health and that she didn’t know what was Marc’s problem the way he kicked and hit

while she drove her skirt rose up to show her thigh and I saw a blotchy red-blue spread on her right leg’s outer smoothness a lake-shaped stain that yellowed at its edges

her right hand gripped the shiftstick and I stiffened

we stopped at the postoffice and I stayed out in the hothouse

while she went inside she left the windows up the sway of her ass departing through the mirror put my dogcock straight though I knew I could not have her though I knew she would not love me with anything but the bluestest condescension the headpat and the nose lightly stroked by her womanfingers fuck I decompose fuck I wander in circles with my tail drooped down fuck I

I waited for her in the car’s heavy burn the way the woman dissolved me in her absence was the way she composed me in her presence

that night again Marc slapped her twice across the face and pushed me from the front door I was fever in my eyes and I found a neighbor’s poodle down the street and I fucked until my tongue came slinking down and the smell the random warmth of the poodle around me moved Karen from my memory but only for a moment and then I wanted her again

the poodle seemed to me only shit to stick myself in and in fact shit was what I did just afterward and she walked through it as she left me the stupid fuck-for-nothing that she was

I slept outside pushed against the door of the garage and when Karen in the morning emerged to feed me she could not fill my dish without her shudders until I rubbed my side against her legs and she held me with abandon

I knocked the food around with my nose and she talked told me how she loved Marc but he hit her and he kicked her and he didn’t treat her any better than he treated me and she couldn’t live
with a man like that but she couldn’t
leave him that when younger she
found herself happy at his spirit but
that she didn’t want his hands on
her one bit when he was angry
she wept the morning
through and I lost my appetite and
went to lie at her feet and then my
courage surged and I pressed my
nose against her legs and even near
the arrow where she really lived
I saw that a trail of rusty
blood had dried upon the curve of
her left thigh
in afternoon with a look on
her face of marble certainty she
called me to the car she waited while
I hiked my leg against a poplar and
then she stroked my head as we
drove crosstown to a storefront with
red letters and a word too long to
read where she disappeared and I
saw her silhouette doing business in
the window and saw her flick her
hair around she was in black clothes
and she shined
stiff-walk from the store-
front to the car without a word to me
she took us home where I ran in the
yard in the evening snapping at
butterflies and smashing my nose
into the grass
I lost my thoughts of her for
a moment when I played out by the
grass and I even felt a single strum of
love for the doberman bitch whose
fenced yard bordered mine
then I grew tired and I
crawled into my basket where I
folded up for sleep
Marc crashed the door shut when he entered
Karen put her face up for a kiss and got a slap

I Don’t Want You Hitting Me Again she said with iron in her eyes and he gave a short harsh laugh
You Bitch he said I Work My Fingers To The Bone
And Then You Order Me Around And I Don’t Think
That I Can Let That Pass Without Some Punishment
she backstepped to a kitchen drawer with
his voice still high and strident You Never Give Me A
Second’s Peace You Never Give Me Love
his voice wound down when he saw the glint of gunsteel in her hands What he said A Fucking Gun
You’re Frightened Even Now I See You Shaking
And You’ll Never Do A Thing
his voice trailed off when she did a thing
when she squeezed her index finger back into her palm first once and then again and he lurched with
his shoulder spurt-red and crashed down to the rug
that was when I near-jumped from my basket and put my paws down to the tile
I approached the two of them but she turned on me with fire around her pretty mouth and
I slid beneath the kitchen chairs and watched from the corner of one eye
the way she looked the vertical to his horizontal her red hair deadly still the smoke still rising off the gun it frightened me but made me love her more
she wept and he resumed his mumbles
You Lousy Cunt How
You Shot Me I Don’t Know
she waited out the night and I stayed beneath the chair Marc’s face twitching often and then not often and she shook with hiccapped rage and she waved the gun before him and she cried the sweetest lullaby
she left me in the morning with her face set in a thin line and she went out to the backyard with a shovel where she began to dig a ditch the grass I had rubbed my nose against the day before ripped open by the metalblade the dirt I often rolled in scattered all over the yardtop
the bluesuits came at the request of a suspicious neighbor maybe the woman who lived in the house with the doberman and when they found the three of us Karen lay face-down upon the mound of dirt she had made with the sharp-edged shovel and she rose and fell with sobs
what she said I didn’t know at first the way the word came ripped apart but when I heard it wept again I knew that she was saying Marc
they took away my rusty angel two big men held her arms back and I asked her When Will You Be Back and the way she looked at me I saw a promise
hours I thought or minutes and she will be back here stroking all my fur electric
Marc with his raw arm and chest gaping kept on staining up the carpet red and they left me with him in the house that night just the two of us and I walked up and licked him where he lay still and he was textured like old meat
he was still in his grey business suit he was always in his business suit
I told him that she was a fine woman and that he shouldn’t have treated her the way he did and that he got what he had coming to him and that she would be back soon and radiant and he stayed still no matter what I said that rotten cock that fuck that shit-ass and he probably thought I was just
saying arf or woof

with dawn the bluesuits cleaned up Marc's red skin and two men who smelled like backyard dirt came and took me to the city where I slept with an ancient-odored dog that seemed to me the one from rancid alley the same one I thought my father was the place we slept was a little larger than a cage with dogs grouped all around us and I could swear I saw a familiar face or two but I was waiting on my Karen and I paid them no attention

for well more than a day the old dog would not speak to me though I asked him many questions like did he ever love a woman and was he ever clean and did he see the sameness in our markings

I told him that he should answer me soon because in a little while Karen would appear to claim me and I didn't want to part from him unfriendly

I wondered if he was my father or even the same dog I saw in the alley in my stray days but I feared asking him outright because I feared the answer no

I wondered if he loved my mother and just couldn't stay in town that night

the bonebag woke me with a howl midway through the second night and I looked into his yellowed eyes and saw an awful clamor I didn't know what he was saying until he brought the volume down and I made out words first one and then the next and then I understood his wild moan They Will Kill Us he said

the fire I saw inside his eyes was the one I saw in Karen's before the pulled her finger twice at Marc

when I asked him what he meant he would not answer even when I asked again more slowly so I walked away on my four legs bold not even shaky from his alarm not paying his crazy howl any mind

I went to curl in the corner and wait for Karen Braun Alpiso to sashay toward me through cage-rows and kneel by mine with burnished peace and smile and take me home

they dragged out the old dog the next day and I called Father Father as they took him but he never looked back and I pushed that fuck from my mind the way I pushed my mother out

and then I was alone with the cold floor against my belly and that night I heard a thin high sound a distant tone of fear and it approached me with full menace and then I realized the sound that scared me was my own and that I whined in fear that Karen would not come and that worse she would not love me and then as night wore on I knew she would not love me I knew she had been punished I knew I had been left alone

the chamber seemed like mercy after that
Jennifer Marshall
etching
and
drypoint
Kiss your sweet ass goodbye

Shorty hung up his boxing gloves
on the nail above the empty watercooler
to remind him of Leavenworth days,
and laid his life down on a 1964 Fleetwood Cadillac.
The vehicle was a real clean smoker
with white walls as bright as a nurse’s dress
and an evening lake for a paint job.

It came standard with
the heavy metal doors,
eight feet in the backseat,
poker-faced wings,
and a boomerang antenna for perfect reception.
It didn’t have a sunroof
and he liked it that way.

The thin layer of dust
showed him how good it was.
Only the lipstick and the sodden matches
he found gave away that it had ever been driven.
He placed blocks on the brake and gas so
he could reach them and
sang the opening to “Carmen”
while he washed and waxed it.

That night,
he filled it with flowers,
his 12 gauge shotgun,
and that starlet who could
bring him to the edge with just her silky underwear,
and he put his foot on the gas
and took it with him
straight to hell
with his pockets empty and
her skirt pulled over his head,
screaming at the graveyards
“I’m just not hungry anymore”
while the nuns carefully blew away.
Scavenger hunt

My love told me there were big-time attorneys in the hall trying her doorknob.
My love told me about the electrician she had seen smoking a lamppost and blowing out stars.
She told me about puddles and her life at the bottom of them.
She whispered leaves and rustled of the approaching Fall.
She spoke of metal flags blowing in a fake breeze and doughboys shipping out once again.
I know some of these are tales.
Dreaming is her first instinct.
But what do you say to your love when she claims
our select flatware formed animals and danced when the moon quickened the gray humid day.

D. Roskill

Miriam Dym
etching
Now I keep vigil by the bed while father pretends to sleep. He has faded a little; his hearing is dull and his voice has an unhealthy hoarseness. Now he doesn’t snore. I can tell when he drifts off by the change in his breath. Then I smoke a cigarette and relax my watch for the few minutes that father dreams.

I come from a long line of insomniacs. When I am about to fall into sleep I sense the apprehension that a man walking in an empty street at night feels when he sees his shadow bisected by the longer shadow of a stranger walking behind. So I shake myself up and pause as if about to look over my shoulder. Years ago, father would keep his jazz records playing from midnight until morning, quiet but audible, enough to calm the frozen apprehension. He doesn’t need them now—he knows them too well.

Then he would tell me about my grandfather, who never slept a night after reaching adulthood, who spent the night pacing through the rooms and sometimes counting the steps, always sure that something he couldn’t place was about to happen in the night. “It runs in the family,” father told me with some sardonic pride, “I got it from my father and he got it from his father and that one got it from his father before that.” Grandfather’s father was a self-styled revolutionary who was imagined to have written his tracts in week-long periods of uninterrupted work. Some of his pamphlets are still in the New York Public Library. My great grandfather maintained that he was kept awake by the spirits of his ancestors stretching back to Isaac, son of Abraham. And perhaps he was.

Father felt the same ghosts. “Listen,” he’d say sudden and hoarse, “Can you hear them?” I strained as hard as I could manage, but finally I always had to answer no, and for a few minutes we sat silently.

I stopped sleeping sometime after my fourteenth birthday. After my first entirely sleepless night father combed the city and came back with a bagful of charms to hang on the door. A rabbit’s foot, an ankh, a big yellow hex and the tooth of a saint—I helped him nail all these to the door beside our mezuzah. It looked crazy to everyone outside and at that time it looked crazy to me, so I called it junk and sulked over the wasted money.

“Junk?” father asked, repeating my words, “Garbage? In Egypt this hung over the tomb of a pharaoh, and it protected his sleep all the way into death. All the houses you see, you look around and even if the owners say they’re not superstitious those houses are filled with their private protections, because all the people in history saw that something was moving.

“And if there’s nothing to it you see that we haven’t lost anything, don’t you, but you see that if there is we have everything to gain. If you listen closely you too will see something, or hear it, or maybe you’ll know it with a sixth sense, and it will speak in a language which you understand without knowing, and then you will agree and you will be as certain as I am.”

Even at fifteen I was the pragmatist and regretted the money spent on father’s superstitions. At dinner I picked dolorously at the food, as if the cost could be regained in an extra pound of leftovers. Father cooked dinners as his grandmother had taught him, lacking a granddaughter she could train in her kitchen with its two sets of dishes and the overfilled pickling jar. After he had lost all the
faith which through his life he still claimed to retain
father cooked strictly kosher meals in a kitchen
maintained by the letter of the Jewish law. He went
to synagogue every Saturday, though if his imagina-
tion had been made actual his synagogues would
have been built with sloped pagoda roofs to channel
the raining spirits. He kept up a Jewish front, but if
he felt God it was only through the ancestral spirits
which kept him awake. His religion is the fervent
belief in history which he inherited from his grandfa-
thor; it takes living form in the space around him,
buffers his ears and perhaps, in the voice of chant-
ing monks, it sings quietly over his thoughts. He is a
Jewish animist, full of mystic ancestral phantoms.

All the charms on the door didn’t work and
father still spent nights in the living room with Ella
Fitzgerald. I slept less and less myself, and soon,
above the record player’s crooning, I began to hear
the mumbled prayers of the apparitions which father
had known for years. I discovered spirits in my food
and water, sensing them falling inside, making
themselves a part of my skin and their voices came
from within my own. Father had his music and
amulets, and I turned to strong herbal teas. I drank
so much that eventually I wasn’t certain if it was the
ghosts or the teas that were keeping me awake.

By the time that I got married I didn’t sleep
at all. I left Columbia when my sense of the other
had turned into a mental tic, a constant diversion
and preoccupation which prevented me from
concentrating on Spinoza and chemistry. At this
point I left college to work in a midtown
accountant’s office filled with Hasidic clients.

I hired a chamber quartet to play Strauss
when I carried my wife through our crazy door.
Father had told me that his friends had played a
waltz in the living room when he brought my mother
home. That was a year before my birth, and the
cherubs painted on the ceiling had not yet faded to a
sallow, unclean complexion. Then father had a
musical clock which played old war songs an octave
too high on every hour.

At the beginning I spent entire nights
feigning sleep, counting passing thoughts and hoping
that my wife wouldn’t catch on. She slept placidly
herself, and was never able to understand sleepless
nights and the quiet pressure which sometimes
seemed to come at the base of the neck, just strong
enough to keep a person from sleeping, or the images
of the pasts which I could not have known created
and recreated for hours at a time in my conceptualiza-
tion. Father paced in his room for most of the late
hours, and she would spend her time devising cures
which father never acceded to.

Claiming to be at the point of despondency,
my wife forced us to buy a plush wing chair in which
father could sit and doze insulated from the sounds
of the house. We placed it in an alcove to the side of
the couch, not far from the stereo. When I was a
child I had used that alcove to stage marionette
plays, pretending it was a proscenium stage. At
night I would wander into it and fall asleep with the
puppets to the soul tone of father’s music.

He never used the chair. Father claimed to
have forgotten how to sleep, insisting on keeping up
his nightly patrol. I began to sit in the chair to nurse
my after-work tea when I came home, and sat until
late evening. Eventually I began falling asleep and
waking up only after midnight.

The chair is situated in such a way that it is
impossible to see the living room couch without
leaning out of the seat. Leaving my wife and father
alone together for several hours each night I devised contingencies and possibilities of what they were doing. As time went by I tried to keep myself awake, hoping to catch them unaware, descending on them with what I imagined to be a knowledge of their sins. I tried to listen to their words barely floating into the alcove, contributing layers of implication to each loose syllable. My wife accused me of paranoia and belittled my fears, steering the conversations to the vacations which we plotted in detail but never seemed able to afford.

I spent long periods in the library over my great-grandfather's writings. He worshipped his God not because he is the Lord God Almighty but because he believed that Jehovah was neither more nor less than the spark which, at the moment of sacrifice, had held Abraham's hand and saved a father from killing his son. At night I heard the same voices which my great-grandfather had perceived fifty years back, and though they spoke in languages which I couldn't understand I strained to listen to their cryptic, decrepit calling. Gradually I became oblivious to the details of my life outside the library. Now it was I who regularly brought back new charms to place over the door.

The night after my wife left I wandered into the living room as I had when I was years younger and found it dark except for the glowing circle of a lighted cigarette. Dunhill—my father always smoked Dunhills taken from red crushproof boxes; he still does though his lungs can't take it. This time we smoked together. I guess it's a kind of family bonding.

Except for the cherubs on the ceiling, father and I were left alone in the apartment again. How absurd—two men who never sleep living in a three bedroom apartment. Taking in more ghosts with each passing year. Now every footprint in the wax of the floor stayed for days or weeks. The blasts of heat which came from the oven carried sickly
bakers' visions and the light smoke which came from the chimneys of villages in which one could spend an entire life without ever venturing into the next town except to attend a marriage. All the charms on the door couldn't keep new shades with their new noises from coming in.

Father and I considered selling the apartment. He thought of showing visitors through our superstition covered door, of how they would laugh at the debilitated angels on the ceiling and the cobwebs hanging over the edges of the bookshelves. They would see the decrepitude the house had fallen into, and we would have followed them through the rooms, conscious not of their bargaining auctioneer's looks but of the exhausted apparitions who languished in the apartment's crevices. Father would have explained the significance of each of the fifty-years' old knick knacks, going over the history of our line as far back as he could know and lying about a past which even his imagination could not reconstruct. And to visitors it would all be academic, his books and overfilled diaries would be unreadable crabbed writing and they would be more interested in the wainscoting. Maybe the neighbors would talk to them, hoping to sell their own apartments and put in some remarks about the "voodooed old guys and their crazy ghosts" and in the end the apartment would have remained unsold anyway and we would have remained behind.

"You do sense it now?" father could have asked me later and I would have had to tell him now that I did, and he would have dropped a spoon at dinner and sat back in his high child's chair and said to me, "Listen to the echo, you can hear who the silverware belonged to before it was ours and what they ate and the clattering platters on which they brought their burnt offerings and even a tremor of their faint, guarded sacrilegious thoughts."

My father's imaginative power increased geometrically and he gave up the hope of a full night of sleep. When he decided that he would stay in the same apartment to the end, that even if it could be sold it would do no good and it would be a private blasphemous remark about his own ancestors, father broke with his habit of temple attendance and devoted himself to contemplation of the spirits which flooded his mind and his home. In his nightly pacings he travelled further and further back into the recesses of history; though he never admits it, I am convinced that his thought has drifted beyond Abraham and Isaac, reaching as far back as the first man. The apparitions of his ancestors pace with him, angrily pleading not to be forgotten, making the floor creak loudly at night.

Now I hear them. I hear the generations which have preceded me, the people whom I have known, and others who do not exist even in my imagination. I drink potfuls of raspberry tea, but I don't sleep. In the dust of my father's books are the pages of characters and histories whose tenuous grasp of existence manifests itself in the almost seen phantoms who glide out of my father's thoughts. If his memory is a disease, then my insomnia is a symptom. Perhaps our hold on the world is as tenuous as that of our remembered ancestors. We both see them, their footprints in our carpets, wearing turbans to reflect the strong light of the world. Now I watch over my father's memories, and father feigns sleep in a pretense that does not deceive even himself.
Greg Kessler
sugar-lift etching
Taek Lee
oil on masonite
Jerusalem Delivered

I woke today Sunbedazzled, amid
A houseful of sleepers; yawned
Through first words,
Inky lungfuls
Spreading lazily against the page,
I wordless waking from our bedclothes bower.

Mary sighs, drowsing on the flannel,
Heavy-lidded bedroom eyes
Remindful of
Erotic breakfasts.
Against the toaster cord unfurl white panes
Of tile sprawl, widening the clinical kitchen,

And dishes transfixed to scaffolding,
The templates of our well-made mornings,
Now scoured silent of
Words hurled past them
(And of her errant lipstick traces), our stilled murmurs
Burnished off the lips of coffee cups.

Above the sill today,
December finds the birch trees bonebare and
Grey, her tallow veins congealed in violet, jealous
Light. Thought
Cups me prayerfully with these wintered mornings,
Turning us slowly round, pressed
Close against the eaves and well-groomed walks,
The rooftops of our foundering Jerusalems.

Mary stirs again within her linen garlands,
Trammelled to the rosewood coils
With delicious filigree
And prettied words
Which she impales on trellises, ties up with wicker withes. Still
Groggy, she jokes about white picket fence

Penitentiaries, and I laugh, though with the
Sight of her brown toes pressed against the
White linoleum, sadness,
Russet-hued,
Consumes me. Meandering along the corridors of a many-chambered Heart, we strew our silences with bitter blossoms
Toward the walk-in closet,
To shrug-on our
Chrysalides.

Paul Saint-Amour
You're hearing this through someone else's voice. Lieutenant Johnson who pilots the supply cutter told me he'd give this letter to one of the nurses in Penn Bay so that they could read it to you. I sent along some apples as well. Even if you can't eat them, they can shrivel up by your bedside until you can smell them. Tisha says that sometimes just having familiar voices, sounds and smells around can bring someone back up to the surface. She said familiar voices help particularly well; you know I'd come if I could leave the light unattended. Back in Louisiana a tanker out of Galveston just drifted up onto a beach and sat there for a couple months. I figure if a tanker drifted up against the island here, oil would cover all the water from here down to Boston. It's strange to think that the only thing between the world and calamity is me, but that's beside the point.

What's it like in the hospital? I don't suppose you really know. Maybe if the nurse reads this to you loud enough, or long enough, or enough times, you'll float to the surface like Tisha says. I'd prefer it if you swam up. Too many weird things float up near this island. Did I tell you I found another shoe on the beach? Well, not really a shoe; it was actually a scuba fin, but close enough. Lord knows there are a lot of shoes floating around in the Atlantic Ocean.

I've been sitting here for hours trying to figure out how to start. I can't remember ever telling you how I got to the island in the first place, so I could start from way back before I left Louisiana. I could do that and lend you my life until you can find your way back to yours. Or maybe I could start from when we first saw each other. Whatever—sometimes you have to write to see.

When you came by that first time, I didn't believe that you had knocked on the door. I heard something, but if it was someone knocking on my door, that sound would be the first I hadn't made or imagined in more than a month, not counting waves or wind, of course. I kept on planing the board I was planing. You knocked again. You must remember all this. You must remember me opening the door wearing that coat. I know I was wearing that coat because I had been wearing it since November. I'm wearing it now. Nothing new. You were a small thing wearing a big battered parka and boots and two wool hats and a scarf and mittens, each one almost as big as the sack you were holding out. All I could see of you was your eyes, small and dark like apple seeds.

"Hatch," you said.
"That's me."
"And me."
"What do you mean?"
"We have the same name."
"You're Hatch too?"
"Our names are the same." These were the first words I had heard since November and I was convinced they were lies. I didn't even know what sex you were.

"I'm freezing."
"It's very cold."
"You have to let me come inside." You stepped inside the door, heels on the threshold.
"If you come all the way in, I can close the door and keep us both from freezing to death."
"Take these," you said, holding out the sack, not moving from the threshold.
"What are they?"
"Apples. They'll freeze in the cellar so you
have to take them.”

The bag was heavy, as if it was filled with lead shot. “What kind are they?”

“Just apples. They’re small and hard because we—I—had to pick them before the first frost.” I looked into the bag. The apples were tiny, but they were bright red.

“Well, thank you. I’ll get you some coffee.”

“Bobby Sugar got scurvy last winter.”

“Who?”

“He lives over on Spruce Island. He got what you get if you don’t have enough apples. And he even lived near the mainland where you can just go out and buy them.”

“Thanks for thinking about my health. I’ll get you some coffee.” I went over and put the sack down and pumped up the little alcohol stove. The wind in the door kept blowing out the flame. I turned around to get you to close it and saw that you had left, leaving me with the bag full of tiny, hard apples and house full of wind howling loud enough to wake the dead.

I’d met Rutger and Tisha the ornithologist. I wondered if you were the crazy girl that Tisha and Johnson said lived with Rutger, but I wasn’t even sure that you were a girl. That was in late January. You were the first person I’d seen since November, and I had never seen you before.

Butler Frank left the farm he grew up on in Louisiana and joined the Coast Guard. He spent the summer after high-school tooling around with his bright green souped-up Dodge Dart resting on cinder blocks in the driveway. At the end of August he decided he wanted to go to sea, so he threw some plastic sheething over his Dodge and got on a bus for Biloxi, where he signed on for a two year stint doing drug patrol. On Sundays, his father used to come over to my father’s woodshop where I worked after school. Butt Frank Sr. would talk about one of two things: how hard it had gotten to get parts for his tractor, or his boy cruising from port to port in Florida, chasing Cuban pussy. My father would blow the shavings off the chair leg or table top he’d been working on, look Butt Frank over once or twice like he’d look over a stump he had to remove from the yard, and go back to work. I never heard my father respond to a word that Butt Frank said; he’d just blow the shavings off his chisel and smooth the long coat he always wore in the shop. After he died and I came back from school to take over the shop, Butt would still come by and tell me about his son’s conquests of Cuban drug kings in Cigarette boats and Cuban women in dental-floss bikinis. One day Butt Jr. himself, home on leave, drove up to the shop in the apple-green Dodge that sounded like the Last Days.

“Join the Coast Guard,” he said. “Be all you can be.”

“What for?”

“You get to chase tail every port you put in to. But besides that, you think you’re going to moon around here your whole life? I’ve known you since you were a kid, Hatch. You’d go and be one of them monks if you were religious.”

“Who says I’m not religious?”

“I do. If you were, you’d be a monk.”

“Thanks for the suggestion.”

“Well, I got to be going.” As he was crossing the porch, he turned and yelled, “Oh, and sorry about your old man. I’m sure it wasn’t your fault.”

Two months later he returned, banging
through the screen door.

“Hey, monk, get this. Now you really have to join the Coast Guard. Looks like you can be a monk and a midshipman at the same time.”

“How, Butt?”

“There was a bulletin posted in mess the other day about a job as a lighthouse keeper way the fuck off the Maine coast. You get a house and provisions and short-wave you can use if you get lonely. All you have to do is wait around until a bulb blows.”

After Butt had roared away, two months passed in which I finished off Mr. Watkins’s high-boy, received a call from a furniture company offering to buy the shop, the lathe, the bandsaw, the planer, and the drill press. There was also a call from a lawyer named Apfel saying that my father’s house would have to be sold to pay off his debts. I didn’t know about any debts, but I didn’t feel like it was my place to ask. I just threw Dad’s chisels and coat into a duffle bag with some underwear, a toothbrush, and Melville’s last three novels. The Trailways driver threw the duffle into the belly of the bus, and I climbed on for the six hour trip to Biloxi.

In the Coast Guard recruiting office an old man with a face more wrinkled than a dried apple and a nose so pug I could see all the way back into his sinuses told me that the Walled Island lighthouse position was now a Maine Fish and Wildlife job, and I would have to call them if I was interested. He said I could use the phone if I moved my bag out of the middle of the office. When I heaved it over under the pay phone, the chisels clanked.

“What’s in the bag, fella?”

“Bones.”

“You ever tended a lighthouse before?”

“No.”

“Then maybe you have mistaken ideas about what you want.”

“I’m sure you are right. What’s the number for the Maine Fish and Wildlife commission?”

A woman on the phone said the job paid eighteen thousand dollars a year, with full government benefits in addition to housing and food. She asked me four times if I really wanted that job. Then she transferred me to a man who said I could start as soon as I could get to Maine.

I took another bus and stared out the window at America until we pulled up under a Trailways sign nailed above the window of a grocery store in Bath, Maine. The driver dropped my bag by a stand of apples. It was October, and Maine was already colder than I had ever known Louisiana to be.

I found the tiny Fish and Wildlife office and told the man in a brown uniform standing behind the desk that I was going to take the job as lighthouse keeper on Walled Island.

“Where you from?”

“Louisiana.”

“Most people crazy in Louisiana?” I didn’t answer. “I thought you were British when you first came in here. The way you talk. That bag all you got?”

“Yes.”

“What’s in it? Car parts?”

“Pistols and rifles.”

“Well there’s nothing to shoot at out there, unless you like.
puffin meat."

"I love it. How do I get out there?"

"There's a Coast Guard cutter'll take you out there tomorrow and leave you with provisions. Hey, buddy, what'd you do wrong to make you feel like you had to atone for it by becoming a lighthouse keeper?"

"I ran over Snoopy."

I spent the night in a tiny room in an empty boarding house. The old woman who owned it told me that she'd heard of Walled Island once, but she thought it was off the coast of Iceland. Then she told me she had to ask me to pay on arrival in case I was an intravenous drug user. After she showed me to my room, I lay on the bed, seeing patterns in the cracks on the ceiling. I could smell apple pies baking somewhere in the house. I thought of the old lady bustling about in her kitchen. If I had ever known my mother, I wondered, would that mean that I would have known my grandmother too? Dad's mother died years ago, he said. She had apparently lived in the northeast, in Canada or Maine.

"I never knew her," Dad said. "She left me and my father just after I was born."

"What, is this a family tradition?" But he didn't answer that question either. I wondered if big ships went by Walled Island. They must, I thought. Otherwise, why the lighthouse? I wondered what people would be doing in those ships. What it would be like looking out from the lighthouse into the night, looking out at ships utterly invisible save for the little sightless eyes of their running lights. I would look out at the glimmer, and somewhere on the ship, the guy at the helm would see Walled Island light sweeping vast areas of ocean again and again. I looked up at the ceiling and wondered if beacon and beckon came from the same root word. Probably not. I thought of the rigid beam of light passing over the ship, a white shaft stiff-arming the world. My new home.

Walking down the stairs the next morning I ran into the old woman.

"Have a nice time on that island. If you get bored, don't try any intravenous drugs. I had a son who looked a little like you. He got bored and started using intravenous drugs. He died, bless his soul."

"I'm very sorry."

"Yes, he was the apple of my eye."

The cutter was manned entirely by sixteen-year-olds, it seemed, save for an officer in his forties who yelled all the time. I felt I was on a boy scout cruise. Everyone was wearing big kapok life preservers. When I got on, a kid took my bag and handed me a life preserver.

"You'll have to wear this, sir. Regulation."

I put it on. With the biggest pockets of kapok sewed into the front of the vest, I felt pregnant. The kid led me to the wheelhouse, and told me that I would be out of the way if I sat on a little fold-down seat near the companionway that led back down to the deck. The kid who steered the boat with a little toggle switch on a control panel asked me why I wanted to take this job on Walled Island.

"I need to catch up on my letter writing."

"Very funny, sir."
To the left of the kid was a radar screen bright in the shadow of a black hood. For the twelve hours we travelled through fog, I watched the green cursor sweep the round screen like the beam of light from a lighthouse. You couldn't see anything through the windows, just grey, and after night fell, just black. Occasionally the guy at the helm looked at the screen. I wondered if we were seeing the same thing. Someone brought me a sandwich and a cup of coffee. Someone took the empty cup away. The bright cursor completed its seep thousands of times. Every time it passed the vertical axis, the radar beeped. This was how time passed.

In the eleventh hour a green blob the size of a quarter drifted onto the screen. If you ever float to the surface, will it be like that? Will a green blob creep into the blackness and eventually turn out to be the real world, or whatever the real world looks like to a radar screen, or a coma victim?

"That's the island, sir," said the guy at the helm. "We'll anchor off the lee cliffs and run you in in the morning. There's no way we could get you in there in the dark."

"Are there cliffs?"

"Yessir. That's why they call it Walled Island. The island is basically a fifteen square mile hunk of granite sitting out in the middle of nowhere. There's an eighty foot drop down to the ocean on all sides."

"Then how do get up onto the island?"

"There's a couple of little coves, sir, where what fishermen that live here put in and out from. They've cut some stone steps into the rock in the tough places so you can pick your way up the sides. You won't have any trouble. Mulligan will be on watch. You can sleep in his berth."

In Mulligan's berth I could see out a sealed porthole. Towards morning the fog lifted and I could see out across the water to where the jagged granite face would be, but beyond the glint of the ocean swelling gently beneath the cutter, there was only a stolid blackness. Every two heartbeats a light whose source I could not see would flash and die, briefly silvering the surface of the water, but these flashes only deepened the darkness beyond the place where I could hear the waves breaking on rock. I remember thinking then that in the course of forty-eight hours I had gone from knowing almost everything to almost nothing about the shape and property of my life. I didn't know where I was, and I didn't know that somewhere on that big piece of rock, so much bigger than I had imagined, you were standing naked by the kitchen sink bathing yourself with a dish rag, or dumping fish bones and potato peeling into the incinerator, or listening to Rutger puke in the toilet. I lay there counting my heartbeats in the rhythm of the invisible light.

"It's time to put in, sir. Here's your bag. The boat will be going in in a few minutes." I must have fallen asleep.

"What do you have in this bag anyway, sir, if you don't mind my asking."

"I've forgotten. I'll look in a second."

Five minutes later I was sitting with my ass eight inches away from the water, my bag between my legs, in one of those little inflatable boats you see in U-boat movies. There were four crates in the boat, and a kid in uniform with his hand on the throttle of the little outboard motor. We sat there for a while bumping against the side of the cutter. After about ten minutes, the older officer, stepped off the gunwale of the cutter and landed on the collapsible floorboards of the inflatable dinghy with a thump.

"Hope you had a pleasant night, Hatch. My name's Johnson. Lieutenant Johnson."

"Lovely, thanks. Pleased to meet you."

"Push off, Ensign. So, Hatch, what moved you to take this job out here?"

"An attack of spleen and vapors."
“Is that like pancreatitis? I had that once. My glands swelled up as big as apples. Nasty business, that was.”

“Who else lives out here?”

“A guy named Rutger and the girl he lives with. He fishes when he’s conscious. They say there’s plenty of fish around here if you can stand living on a big rock. There’s a couple other fishermen who live together on the other side of the island, but the minute they catch enough to keep them in vodka until the mackerel season, or the menhaden season or whatever, they hot-tail it off the island. Seems to me that’d be the smart thing to do. There’s also the bird lady, an ornithologist or whatever. This island’s one of the only places in the states where the puffins come to raise their young, puffins and an ugly kind of bird called the razorbilled auk. Apparently the cliffs are a good habitat for both species. They nest in the cracks. That bird lady is one weird chick.”

We rounded a little point and rode a swell into a small cove. The ensign tilted the prop of the outboard out of the water with a harsh gurgle just as we surfed up onto a narrow rock beach. Enormous trunks of trees and countless smaller fragments of driftwood had washed up past the tide line. Some pieces were even wedged up in the crags on the granite face.

“Bad storms out here?” I asked the older officer, whose name I hadn’t learned.

“It can get pretty raw out here, especially in winter. But you won’t blow away. If goofy looking little birds can take it, you can too.”

It took us about thirty minutes to get the crates and the bag up the face, picking our way up the rough granite steps. The ensign stayed down with the boat. When we finally reached the top, I was amazed. I’d expected to see a jagged expanse of broken granite white with bird shit baked by the sun. Instead I found myself in a waist deep kind of coastal krumholtz of bayberry and juniper covering an open area about two hundred yards wide between the cliffs and the dense growth of short but sturdy pine and hemlock that seemed to be the primary vegetation on the island.

Wood to work with, I thought.

We carried the crates about a quarter of a mile along the edge of the cliffs, picking our way along a narrow path through the bayberry and juniper. We got to the headless lighthouse, the one that had been decapitated in a gale in 1935. The tower itself looked as if it had been built solid enough to survive Armageddon, but the light itself had been torn off by that storm. Smoke poured out of the top.

“That’s the old lighthouse. Rutger lives there in the old keeper’s house with that crazy girl. At least I think she’s crazy. Nobody talks much out here, so it’s kind of hard to be sure. He built a brick smokehouse in the old lighthouse. He smokes his fish there with apple wood he cuts inland.”

“No he doesn’t,” I said.

“What do you mean? Of course he does.”

“There’s no way that apple trees could grow out here. I work with wood. I know where trees can grow.”

“Well maybe you don’t know everything, Mr. Hatch. So happens that the island is high enough so that the salt spray can’t get to the trees inland. Rutger and his girl tend a grove of about two hundred trees in the center of the island.”

I looked at your little brick house. The brick had darkened, and saltpeter from the mortar had streaked the walls like the streaked skin of an Empire apple. Didn’t seem like any kind of gale could touch the squat little structure. You are like your house. In that sense you are like both Rutger and your house. You are all built close to the ground.

We walked another quarter mile. The
crates were becoming more and more difficult to carry.

"How far do we have to go from here?"
"You're just up here on this point. Maybe five more minutes."

Johnson may have been right about the five minute part, but the crates had become so heavy that it felt like an hour. Eventually we stopped about thirty yards from a small house constructed of unpainted cinder block and roofed with green asbestos tile. Behind the house there was a water tank, a large generator, and about a cord of wood stacked neatly against the wall, and a small radio tower, maybe fifty feet tall.

"Welcome home."
"Is that a radio tower?"
"No, Hatch, that's the light."
"That's the light?"
"What, did you think you'd have one of those old fashioned ones with a kerosene lamp and mirrors and endless wood steps inside?"

I looked up at the tower again. It was a tapered frame of welded steel bars, none of them bigger than my wrist. At the top, four sodium vapor lamps lit up every couple of seconds. In the bright daylight they seemed pale and out of place.

"Well, if I'm not going to be toting tins of kerosene up a hundred flights of steps, what am I going to be doing here?"

"You'll refuel the generator and change the bulbs if they blow. You can do it if you passed kindergarten. I hope you brought your knitting. Average life of one of those bulbs is about twenty-four months."

The house had two rooms in it, one with a little alcohol stove, the kind with a hand pump, a sink and a water heater; the other had a toilet, a small wood-burning stove, a shower head and a drain in the corner. Each looked to be about ten feet square; each had one window, a small portable heater, and no carpeting on the cement floors. In the room with the stove, there were six or seven crates just like the ones we had brought. Above the stove there were a number of shelves, each one sagging beneath the weight of enough canned food to feed one person for about a year. There was one pot on the stove, and two plates and a glass in the sink. In the other room, near the toilet, there was a rolled up piece of foam. I assumed that was what the previous occupant had slept on.

"Who was here before me?"
"A fellow who quit after about a month. Couldn't deal with the quiet. Government doesn't provide much in the form of diversion, does it?"
"Looks pretty sparse. Why does the government pay someone to live out here anyway?"
"Ten miles east you have a major shipping lane. Freighters and supertankers. Couldn't afford to have the light blow, could they?"
"Why can't Rutger or the ornithologist do it?"
"You getting cold feet?"
"No, just wondering."
"Well, I got to be going. Best of luck. Maybe you and Rutger will become fast friends."

He shut the door behind him, and three weeks passed before I saw Rutger or the ornithologist or anyone. I spent the first week staking out and cutting down several young spruces with my handsaw, stripping them where they fell, and dragging them back to my house. I split the wood with an axe and maul I found on the woodpile and began the slow process of making pole furniture without any power tools. By the end of the third week I had made a couple of stools and a work table for the room with the toilet and bedroll in it. In the evenings I ate food from tins, and let it get dark without lighting the lantern I found in one of the crates. I thought about how I would build a low frame for the bedroll. I watched shapes appear in the darkness,
and wondered who else was on this island with me. I don’t know why, but I had no urge to find out.

One bright afternoon I was kneeling outside my door, smoothing the planks for the bed frame with my father’s hand plane when somebody tapped me on the shoulder.

“I could have killed you,” he said. I stood up; he reeked of vodka. I was looking down at a small man with all his features clustered in the middle of his face. He was scowling at my chest.

“Excuse me?”

“If I had been the enemy, I could have killed you good. Smushed your head like a rotten apple.”

“What enemy?”

“You’re lucky I didn’t. Are you British?”

“No, I’m from Louisiana. Name’s Hatch.” I stuck out my hand, but he didn’t do anything. He kept on looking at my chest.

“Hatch is it? Got any brothers and sisters around here?”

“Nope. Thought I’d get away from home for a while.”

“Wanted peace and quiet?”

“Basically, yes.”

“Didn’t want anybody
It was a week, a small chair and a rudimentary counter later that the bird woman came. She knocked at the door.

"Hatch! Hatch!"

"Yes?" I crawled out from under the counter holding a screwdriver in my hand and six screws in my mouth.

"So you’re Hatch. I’m Tisha the ornithologist, but you can call me Tisha."

"Pleased to meet you. How….. how did you know my name?"

"It was my mother’s maiden name. I’d never forget it."

She looked to be in her late seventies, her face dark and leathery like the bark of an apple tree, but as she stood in the doorway, she bounced on her heels youthfully, like a young woman late for a pressing engagement. She had brilliant black eyes, and I couldn’t quite tell where she was looking.

"I need you to do me a favor. I would have come by sooner, but I’ve been very busy with the fledgling auks."

"The what?"

"The auks. Baby auks. It’s almost impossible to keep them from dying. It’s a wonder the six thousand razorbills still in existence are around at all. One out of two or three hundred babies survives. It’s so depressing. You walk along at that bottom of the cliffs, and there are scores of them lying around like apples fallen from a tree. You’d think they’d adapt to a more hospitable climate. As soon as the cold comes, they just up and die. And what is particularly strange, do you know what is particularly strange?"

"No."

"They cannot survive on what their parents feed them. If that isn’t a laugh. If you feed them masticated shellfish, like their parents do, they’ll do fine for about three months, but then they get this weird kind of immune deficiency. They get really skinny, and then they get pneumonia. Nothing more pitiful than a baby auk with pneumonia. They sneeze for about a week, then they suffocate on their own phlegm, bless their little hearts. I finally found after losing a couple thousand fledglings a year, that they did noticeably better if I mushed up some of Rutger’s apples into the masticated shellfish. Have you met Rutger?"

"Yes, he came over here told me not to ever—"

"Well he was doing you a favor. He is a peckerwood if ever a peckerwood walked on God’s green earth. I caught him stealing auk eggs from the nests on the cliff. ‘What are you doing with those, Bobby Rutger?’ I asked. And do you know what he said?"

"What?"

"He said, ‘I woke up this morning with a craving for an auk omelet. You’re welcome to have some, Tisha, if you want.’ What a wiseapple! He makes omelettes out of my life’s work. So you see, a dyed in the wool, U.S. grade A peckerwood if I ever did see one."

"Can I make you some coffee?"

"Never touch the stuff, gives me the runs."

"Can I get you anything? Seems like years since I’ve spoken to anyone."

"Oh, now I wouldn’t worry about that. After a while you’ll hate the sight of people, like Rutger. I’ve been here two years and I can’t stand people any more."

"Really?"
“Yes. I find this conversation very unpleasant. In fact, I think I’ll be going now.” She walked away toward the path, but turned around abruptly.

“I almost forgot what I came here for. I hear you’re a dab hand with wood, is that right?”

“Yes, I suppose so.”

“Good. I need you to make for me two poles for a bird net I use to catch errant species. You’d be surprised what turns up in those nets way out here on the edge of nowhere. I once found a male spongy sapsucker. Can you believe that?”

“No.”

“Well, they should be slender poles, almost willowy. And each one should be about twice my height. When you’re done with them, just lean them against the light tower—I’ll sneak by and pick them up.”

And then she turned around and walked away. That was the first week of November. I went out and cut down two balsams that had grown in the shade of some larger spruces. In the shade they had grown reasonably tall without reaching a diameter of more than a couple of inches near the ground. It seemed strange as I was cutting them that each of these thin trees could easily be close to forty years old. I stripped and sanded the trunks, and sharpened the thick end of each so the poles could be planted easily in the ground. Then I lashed them together and leaned them against the light tower. When I went outside the next morning to get wood for the stove, they were gone. I had heard nothing in the night. That day I found some weathershipping in one of the crates and recaulked the windows. I spent the next three months working on end tables and settees and secretaries and vanity tables and porch swings for nonexistent people in nonexistent houses. Sometimes I would look up from my work and out the window at the fog and freezing rain. Every two seconds, the light would flash its glib warning at ships I never saw. After a while I quit thinking about the light. After a while I quit thinking about everything.

All that was what happened before you came. All that was stuff I never told you. Maybe you’d figured it out already from hints I dropped, or common knowledge. If Tisha knew my name and when I had finished her poles, maybe you knew all this before you came over with your bag of small hard apples. Do you remember the rest? The night you hid under my counter after Rutger had chased you half way around the island with a gaff hook, screaming that he’d shove an apple in your mouth and bake you in the smokehouse unless you’d do it for him. I never asked you what “it” was, figuring that there are some things one is better off not knowing. And maybe if you had told me, I might not have believed you.

Or the time you came over and managed to crawl in my sleeping bag with me without waking me up. I opened my eyes later on to find you sound asleep, holding me as if I were the last thing afloat. I felt your small breasts press against my chest like two small apples with every breath you took, one breath for every two times the light flashed, casting different shadows through the room. I must have fallen asleep again. When I woke up and the room was light, you had left without leaving a trace, not even a hair on the pillow.

Or the second time you did that little appearing and disappearing act, or the third time, or the sixth. You were like a recurring dream I couldn’t understand. I tried to wake you up and ask you, but you slept as if sleeping was the only thing you could do. Anyway, I’m not even sure what I would have asked you. What’s your first name? Why don’t you come by in the day? How do you get toothpaste on an island like this? Are you Rutger’s sister, or wife, or guardian angel?

Or the nights that I woke up and thought
you were there, only to find that I was alone with a thousand shadows reorganizing every time the light flashed. Do you remember any of these things?

Do you remember the day Rutger figured out where you had been at night and shot six holes in my water heater and six more at the light, which he never hit, which kept on blinking like the eyes of an idiot, which kept on taunting Rutger and his empty gun. He didn’t shoot either one of us, but made lots of promises.

Or the next night when you followed me out to the little point in front of my house where I had gone to watch the northern lights. We stood there watching the solar winds blow through the curtains of light until that vast tanker churned by the island so close to where we were standing that it seemed like we could reach out and touch it, so close that I could see the light from the light tower illuminating its sides. I could see the words “Maça, Lisboa” painted on the side. I could see right in through the lighted windows of the wheelhouse, but I didn’t see a soul.

“What does ‘maça’ mean?”

“Your guess is as good as mine. That ship should have sunk it came so close.”

Do you remember how we thought that Rutger must have swum out to that tanker and sailed to Lisbon? Or how you looked all over for him the next day, in the orchard, on the beach, on the other side of the island, and found nothing but his boat on the mooring, where he had left it, and the fire tended in the smokehouse, as he had left it, and the house just as it looked when you left the night before? You said that people don’t just disappear like that, and I didn’t say anything.

Or how we’d talk about nothing with each other, as if we were repeating words we had heard other people say about things that happened years ago. You never told me about your life, no stories about your second grade teacher, about your best friend in college, about the little scar on your forehead. You never mentioned anybody. You didn’t even mention Rutger. You never asked me about my life, or why I was out here. We just sat around drinking a lot of cider. There must be a lot you have never told me, like where you and Rutger came from. It seems like a significant gap between us.

Could you tell me what it was like feeling me pick you up in the drifted snow near the orchard, that night I’d become worried and gone out looking for you? What it was like feeling me carry your stiff form to Tisha’s house, hearing me making noises like a peacock as I crashed through the hemlocks, my body wallowing in the snow and blackness. Did you hear Tisha after she had wrapped you in six blankets and laid you out on her hearth like a dead Iroquois child, when she said, “Serious hypothermia. She’ll die most likely. Not much we can do about it, except try to get her in to the mainland. Crazy girl.”?

Do you remember the long haul across the island in your cocoon, the climb down the cliff and the trip in the dinghy out to Rutger’s boat? Tisha rowed and I breathed on your face, as white as the flesh of an apple that had been newly sliced. After Tisha managed to get the engines to the boat started, she said “You better get in those blankets with her. She’ll fade fast without your heat.” In the blankets, I couldn’t tell if you were breathing or dead. I made threats to you and rubbed your face and hands and back. There I was again, wedged between the world and calamity. I felt seasick.

At the dock in the harbor of some town I didn’t know, Tisha called an ambulance, which made the loudest noise I’d heard in months. I was sure it would wake you up. The woman in a blue suit said you were still hanging on, for miraculous reasons. While we sat in the emergency room, Tisha told me about the molting cycle of the blue-footed booby. We stayed with you at the hospital until they
said you were stable in your coma. Do you remember any of this? Could you tell me your side of this? Or maybe I should keep talking.

I could tell you a sort of story. About my dad. I would have if you had asked. He blew up in the dust room. And it was my fault. There was a small shed built against the back of the shop connected to the house by a door. That was where my dad kept four steel drums to keep the sawdust in. He was constantly sweeping up sawdust and putting it in those drums.

"Always cover the drums. Never leave them open. If that dust gets and reaches the proper density and then somebody walks in there with a cigarette, it’ll explode. Flour can do the same thing. We are surrounded by everyday, household explosives." My father was always saying things like that.

One week the last drum filled up, and I never got around to carting it down to the dump. Dad was staining some chairs up in the attic, so he didn’t have much call to go into the dust room for five or six days. I just swept the dust in there and left it in a pile on the floor. Nobody quite knows how it happened, but I was in town buying drill bits when he blew up. Nobody knows what it was that my father did in the dust room to create a spark. Anything the coroner wrote down was a guess. For some unknown reason, the air became saturated with the exact density of sawdust needed to detonate in the shed. Someone driving by felt a thump and saw a white flash and called the fire department, but when the fire trucks arrived, there wasn’t even a fire. It had been blown out in the explosion. The house sustained minimal damage, but behind the house all they found was a smoking crater, the twisted tin roof to the shed, and what they believe to have been a dustpan. If they found anything of my father, they didn’t tell me. It was as if, like Rutger, he had simply slipped out of the universe, leaving an empty space that the air rushed to fill.

That’s how my dad, the story of my mother and my childhood were erased. At least that’s how I felt when they told me. I didn’t feel I’d lost someone so much as I felt there were things now that he couldn’t tell me. All I know about my father is that his father was named Hatch, like you, like me. I have his coat, his chisels and a mangled dustpan. It’s around here somewhere.

Maybe if you come out of this you could tell me something new, something you learned in your coma. Maybe all your old stories churned off to Lisbon in the hold of the Maçã, heading eastward out of the radar screen and the reach of the Walled Island Light. Maybe there’s an old lady in Lisbon, as wrinkled as a dried apple, who can tell me what you can’t. Strange to think that someone has read you almost this entire letter by now, and I haven’t even finished writing it. What is it like to hear these things in a coma? Is it like a dream, or anything at all? Last night I woke up freezing and thought somebody was in my house reading to me. It was either you or my father. Then I realized that the door had blown open, and that any noise I heard was just the wind, howling loud enough to wake the living.
Unsurprised

(July 1989)

We stood on the beach as the galaxy;
for her I traced its shape across the sky.
She said It’s just a cloud, I smiled and shook my head.
Once she knew, she was quiet, but there was no awe in her eyes;
she said Think your big thoughts, I’m going back inside.
In the first second, the universe was glowing light,
since then it has slowed and cooled and darkened,
to stand all but empty, black and frozen and old,
and the stars are just an easier way to blow what’s left apart,
as time, all but still, struggles to finally stop.
The waves were falling out of the sea; in their quiet entropy
I watched her leave; I was not surprised.

Jason Fry

worming

peepholes get bolted to the eyes
throttled with an archipelago of squats
drizzling hosiery about the floor
the trumpets trumpets of strumpets
finger the clotted lips
oh crank out an overture on that organ grinder
would you

will not faint I will not faint I will not

hey hey
fidelity is not about us mister
these bleats cheap n easy
whereupon I spit up a few platitudes
flabby puddles to set a mutt in

I will not faint this time I will not faint

through the hemorrhaging light moves the banner
take it the flaccid banner of breasts

—take it home
those badges lodged brusquely
in the skull the trespass the pin-ups
all clutched to the interiors of closets

I’m becoming a man who abuses his dog

Francis Malenkov
Beginnings

At night the streets of New Haven jewel with traffic.
You’ve heard their names: Elm, Cottage, High, Chapel.
At night the streets are round with the city’s breath.
Your laughter comes around the corner.
Invisible hands close the shutters,
and the lights are muffled, easy leaks in the night.
A streetlamp goes out—
in all the world, this sudden blank.
I turn, my heart fills with the rain,
and we are each other, hatless and crying,
we are each other in the glorious storm,
we are each other in the finding.
A great cog somewhere slips a tooth
and I can feel it all begin again.

Hilary Liftin

? is the typewriter’s favorite child.
Think it like this: ? don’t name it.
Hold it like a gift,
(the cherry sun)
eat a handful for lunch.
Fill your throat
with black swans and music
before the . . . come marching
and everything goes out.

Hilary Liftin
Tokyo
November 13, 1989
I saw the magazine's name listed in the Fiction Writer's Market, hence this query letter. I would like to send some stories and articles for favor of publication in your magazine.... I'm sending a small list of stories with this letter, some of which contain my view on life. Some of the stories are based on true incidents, related to the various problems human kind is facing today....

I WISH I WERE A DOG
(A case in a family court in which a married couple seeks divorce on account of a pet bought by the husband for the wife. Almost all dialogue.)

GOD IS MY ENEMY
(A story of a woman, based on a true incident, who contracts syphilis through bad blood transfusion, which completely ruins her life. The story has a bearing on the cases of AIDS today.)

I SOLD MY BABY FOR A MILLION YEN
(another title: THE SURROGATE MOTHER)
(A college girl, short of money to pay for her education, lends her womb to bear a child, through artificial insemination, for an unknown father.)

-S.Z.
THE ONLY NAME CHANGES WE’VE MADE IN OVER 100 YEARS.

Considering the unpredictable nature of the financial markets, it's comforting to realize that one thing on Wall Street has remained the same for over a century. Kidder, Peabody is still Kidder, Peabody.

Our commitment to client service hasn’t changed, nor has our talent for discovering opportunity in times of uncertainty.

Kidder, Peabody has withstood the test of time because of what it stands for: a dedication to excellence. And that's another thing that won't change.

Kidder, Peabody
Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim. Consequently, the good is no ‘better’ than the bad — there is only simultaneity, in values as in everything else. This simultaneity applied to the economy of facts is communism, in which the end begins and the means are the end. The great ills of our age are the result of this.”

In short, the Communists everywhere support the revolutionary movement against the existing social and political order of things. And above all, Fascism, the more it considers and observes the future and the development of humanity, the more it can accept the idea of revolution as the best means of salvation. In fact, Fascism is the only means of salvation that the human race has ever known. It is the only means of salvation that has ever been known. It is the only means of salvation that has ever been known to mankind. It is the only means of salvation that has ever been known to mankind.

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